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General Assembly

Official Records

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

255th meeting

Thursday, 29 November 2000, 10.30 a.m.

New York

Chairman: Mr. Ka ..... (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Today the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is holding a solemn meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

It is my pleasure and honour to welcome Mr. Harri Holkeri, President of the General Assembly; Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations; Mr. Peter van Walsum, President of the Security Council; Mr. John de Saram, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine; and Mr. Danilo Türk, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I wish also to welcome Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia and Chairman of the twenty-seventh session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, as well as representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and all others who have accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this solemn meeting.

I would now like to invite everyone present to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of all those who have given their lives for the cause of the Palestinian people and the return of peace in the region.

The participants observed a minute of silence.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Please allow me at this point to make a statement on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights Palestinian People.

For more than 20 years now, moved by a feeling of shared responsibility, we have marked 29 November each year as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People through the holding of a solemn meeting. It is a great honour to welcome so many representatives of Member States, of observer States, of organs of the United Nations, of intergovernmental bodies and of civil organizations. Your massive presence here shows that the international community, responding to the invitation issued by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, once again wishes to express its unfailing support to the Palestinian people in its legitimate struggle to regain its inalienable rights. I wish to thank all of you.

During the past year the parties to the conflict were able to overcome certain obstacles and even achieve certain progress. Hence, the Committee welcomed with satisfaction the various measures adopted in order to follow up the 1999 Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, particularly as regards the

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freeing of political prisoners, the opening of a safe passage route between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which is called the southern route, the continuing withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank, the restart of negotiations on final status and interim arrangements, and the signing of Israeli-Palestinian agreements on economic questions and on the opening of the shipyard in the Gaza seaport.

Even if they did not yield results, the intensive discussions at Camp David under the auspices of President Clinton last July, and the agreements in principle that they gave rise to, gave us grounds for some optimism. Hence, we were very concerned when, at the end of September, the peace negotiations were brutally interrupted following the visit by Mr. Sharon to the holy site of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and following the explosion of violence that was unleashed by that visit.

What a disappointment it is today, after seven years of arduous negotiations, that our common hope has not been realized, namely that of seeing the parties achieve a final settlement and move to comprehensive withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied Palestinian territories — including Jerusalem — and, above all, that of being able to celebrate the proclamation of an independent Palestinian State that is a full member of our Organization. We also once had reason to dream of a future of peace, reconciliation and cooperation that would benefit all the peoples of the Middle East, including Israel. Now we see that the peace process has been struck a terrible blow and that there is a risk that the region will plunge back into chaos and violence.

The current resumption of violence, which has led to nearly 300 deaths and many thousands of injured persons, has unfortunately also led to a rupture between the parties. The entire international community is now very concerned and is quite rightly expressing its ardent desire to see an end to violence, the return of calm and for the parties to resume their discussions around a negotiating table. In recent weeks, the Security Council and the General Assembly, at its resumed emergency special session, adopted some very important resolutions in which they reaffirmed the rights of the Palestinian people, reiterated the obligations of the occupying Power, and underscored the need to end the violence so as to get the peace process back on track.

The only way — I really mean the only way — open to the parties in the Middle East is to accept and respect comprehensively the resolutions adopted by the United Nations. Unilateral acts and the use of force, no matter how brutal, will never extinguish the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people or supplant international legitimacy. Only the comprehensive application of the recommendations of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement adopted last month and the immediate resumption of peace talks will end the present crisis. In doing so, the two parties must cooperate fully with the United Nations and the co-sponsors of the peace process.

We are all quite aware that the questions that must still be resolved are extremely complicated, very emotionally charged and of major importance for the future relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as for the future of all the peoples of the region. The road still to be travelled is certainly a very difficult one, but good will and determination should make it possible for the parties to overcome the obstacles and see their efforts crowned with success. We would like to continue to hope that Israelis and Palestinians alike will respect the letter and the spirit of the bilateral agreements reached to date, and that they will apply them in their entirety, in good faith and as soon as possible.

In my opinion and that of the Committee, this requires most importantly that an end be put to the settlement policy being pursued by the Israeli party without, as it seems, any concern for the peace negotiations it should be holding. The international community has emphasized many times the unacceptable and illegal nature of those settlements, whether they be old settlements or new ones. We in the Committee have never ceased to reiterate that this sort of action significantly changes the composition of the Palestinian territory that is the focus of negotiations. Those illegal acts make a territorial balance impossible and will predetermine the outcome of permanent status talks. The settlement policy is also a very clear manifestation of occupation and runs counter to the spirit and letter of the peace process based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We see the consequences of that policy today, as those settlements are the scene of violent confrontations that have led to enormous suffering and tremendous damage.

The situation in the Holy City of Jerusalem is another matter of great concern to the international community owing to certain illegal measures taken on the ground that are aimed at modifying the demographic and physical status of the Holy City. I need not recall again that the occupying Power must guarantee protection and access to the Holy Sites, both Islamic and Christian ones.

It is essential that the violence we have seen flare up in recent weeks be contained if it is not to undermine the peace process and the progress towards peace made in recent years. In their aspiration to find a common future of peace, security and prosperity, the parties will always be able to rely on the support of the international community and, in particular, on the commendable efforts of the co-sponsors of that process and of other parties. On the one hand, the international donor community has an important role to play in enhancing the economic assistance it has provided for many years to Palestinians — a people who live under very fragile conditions, especially as the occupying Power has systematically sealed off the Palestinian territories and has recently imposed Draconian financial sanctions against the Palestinian Authority.

The international community is also duty-bound to tackle urgently the question of the modalities for deploying interposed elements between the parties to the conflict so as to prevent bloodshed and heavy losses of human life. That could be a confidence-building measure that would not only protect the people involved, but would also make it possible to restore peace to the areas of confrontation and, ultimately, even to assist the members of the commission of inquiry established under Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) to properly carry out the job entrusted to them by the international community.

On the other hand, the United Nations must continue to carry out its responsibilities with regard to the question of Palestine until that issue is settled in all respects. In that regard, our Committee would like to thank the Secretary-General for his courageous initiatives and outstanding efforts, which have helped to restart discussions between the parties. His ideas, advice and clear political vision have contributed a great deal to containing the situation. The international community has greatly appreciated his positive involvement.

As I said earlier, last year we had the hope that, once peace and security returned to the region, the Palestinian people would at last, at the threshold of the third millennium, enjoy their inalienable rights, and that a better future for all the children of the Middle East would begin. Although the parties have not been able to seize the opportunity presented to them at the beginning of this highly symbolic millennium, we must now make a renewed appeal to the co-sponsors of the peace process, to other Governments, to the United Nations family, intergovernmental organizations, civil society groups and eminent personalities to dedicate themselves resolutely to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Arab crisis.

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I reaffirm again our unswerving commitment to the attainment of that noble objective, which we all continue to pursue, in cooperation with all Member States and civil society actors.

I take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his ongoing active support for the activities of the Committee. In his role as peace-builder he has never failed to help us and to lend his support, for which we are most grateful. I wish also to thank the Presidents of the General Assembly and of the Security Council for their continued interest in the work of the Committee and for their sustained attention to the problems of the Middle East.

We take great pleasure and pride in the presence here today of many representatives bearing messages of support and solidarity. Those messages are a source of inspiration and encouragement not only to the Committee but also, and above all, to the Palestinian people. I welcome the representatives of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and of the League of Arab States, with which the Committee has had most valuable tripartite cooperation on the question of Palestine since 1997. Our thanks to go the Secretaries-General of those two organizations.

I call on all representatives of Member States and of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to step up their support for the peace process, which must be salvaged at all costs. Whatever the difficulties, obstacles and bitterness, the parties have no alternative to that peace process, which in the Committee's view is an irreversible strategic choice.

I now call on the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Harri Holkeri.

Mr. Holkeri (Finland), President of the General Assembly: It is an honour for me to address this solemn meeting in my capacity as President of the Millennium Assembly. I am following in the steps of my predecessors, who come here every year to reaffirm the overwhelming support and commitment of the international community to promoting the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people.

The question of Palestine has been on the United Nations agenda for more than 50 years. It was on 29 November 1947 that the General Assembly adopted its resolution 181 (III), partitioning Palestine into two States, one Arab and one Jewish, with an economic union between them. Jerusalem was to be placed under a special international regime. That plan was never implemented, but it is interesting to note how proposals aimed at breaking the current impasse go back to those or similar arrangements.

Since the 1991 Middle East peace conference in Madrid, a number of important agreements have been reached by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements signed in 1993 was welcomed by the international community as a significant step towards peace in the Middle East. It showed that it was indeed possible to overcome years of animosity, mistrust and suspicion.

The path the two sides have since embarked upon has not been an easy one. There have been numerous setbacks in recent years, but also many achievements. This year should have been special, in the sense that a final status agreement should have been reached. Instead, in recent weeks we have been witnessing a sharp deterioration of the situation, which challenges the very foundations of the peace process.

The United Nations has been present throughout all this, consistently upholding the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter, the norms of international law and human rights, and relevant resolutions. In view of the recent outbreak of violence, the General Assembly and the Security Council responded with urgency and determination. The General Assembly, at its resumed tenth emergency special session in October, condemned the violence and the excessive use of force against Palestinian civilians. It reiterated the illegality of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and demanded that the occupying Power abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949. The General Assembly supported the establishment of a mechanism to inquire into the recent tragic events and called for the resumption of peace talks and the speedy conclusion of a final settlement agreement between two sides.

I would like to pay special tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his role at the recent Sharm el-Sheikh summit and for his subsequent efforts to end the violence and bring the negotiating process back on track. I fully support the efforts of the Secretary-General and his representatives, in coordination with the co-sponsors of the peace process and other interested parties, to end the current spiral of violence and to re-start peaceful negotiations towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

With respect to human rights, I would like to refer to the recent report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in which she expressed her deep concern about the serious deterioration of the human rights situation. She also noted the importance of the quest for peace with justice and respect for human rights, and the need for renewed efforts by both sides to halt the violence.

As President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session, I would like to reaffirm the Assembly's position that the United Nations should retain permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is effectively resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law and justice.

We are all committed to working towards that goal, guided by respect for the universally recognized principles of international law, the United Nations Charter and relevant United Nations resolutions, notably Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The Palestinian people should be able to exercise their inalienable rights as spelled out by the General Assembly, in particular the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty and the right to return to their homes and property or to receive compensation in the case of those choosing not to return.

For peace to take root and become viable, social and economic is essential. In particular, it must accompany political agreements and arrangements. In this respect, the international community should step up its efforts to provide much-needed economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

Allow me, Sir, to conclude my intervention by paying tribute to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which, under your most able and dedicated guidance, has continued to promote the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, to support the peace process and to bring the question of Palestine to the forefront of issues dealt with by the General Assembly, the Security Council, the broader United Nations system and international civil society.

In implementation of the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, the Committee has made, and continues to make, an important contribution to the accomplishment of all these tasks. I wish it every success in its mission.

The Chairman: I give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: Allow me first to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for once again inviting me to participate in this annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This solemn occasion allows us to renew our commitment to the goal of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and express our solidarity with, and support for, the Palestinian people.

Since November 1947, all my predecessors have been engaged in efforts aimed at finding a fair, equitable and peaceful solution to this complex issue. I pledge to continue to pursue the subject with all the means and resources at my disposal.

We are meeting today at a very sensitive and difficult time in the peace process. In the course of the past year, the parties have continued to make determined efforts to overcome decades of suspicion and animosity in order to build bridges of reconciliation and partnership. They have succeeded in narrowing gaps on some points and have reached agreement on a number of specific issues. In spite of the difficulties encountered in reaching an agreement at Camp David last July, both sides have demonstrated determination to move forward. We are reassured by their resolve and hope that the negotiating momentum will not be lost.

Regrettably, following the September events in East Jerusalem, the situation on the ground began to escalate, rapidly reaching crisis proportions and putting on hold again the prospects for further negotiations. The Committee will recall that in the past two months, various parties, myself included, have been working to persuade the two sides to end the violence and breathe life into the negotiating process. Throughout my visit to the region, the situation on the ground in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip remained extremely tense and volatile.

The understandings reached at Sharm el-Sheikh were viewed as a critical first step towards restoring the status quo, resuming the peace process and setting up a mechanism to inquire into the causes of violence. To achieve this, it was absolutely essential for the parties to implement these understandings in full and in good faith.

Earlier this month, I welcomed the appointment by President Clinton of the fact-finding committee, established in accordance with the understandings reached at Sharm el-Sheikh. I was also hopeful that the Committee would carry out its duties with impartiality and thoroughness and that it would thereby make an important contribution to the search for a just and lasting peace.

As the situation deteriorated, I appealed to the leadership of the two sides to refrain from making emotional public statements and weigh their words with great care. The same should apply to the wider international community. We all should do our best to assist the Palestinians and the Israelis in their historic quest for peace.

I should like to seize this opportunity to call upon the parties once again to preserve the achievements of the past nine years of the peace process and steadily move ahead along the path of peace and reconciliation.

Let me also add that there is one issue that is viewed by Palestinians and many others as the principal cause of the present crisis, and here I am referring to the continued confiscation and destruction of Palestinian property and the construction and expansion of settlements and roads in the occupied

territories. These actions seriously complicate the discussions by the parties of the permanent status issues.

The worsening of the situation on the ground in the past several weeks has had an extremely damaging effect on the Palestinian economy. Repeated border and international closures have led to a dramatic deterioration in the living conditions of the Palestinians, whose economy is largely dependent on that of Israel. As a result of the conflict, the unemployment and poverty rates have risen considerably, after several years of improvement.

There is a growing sense of despair, frustration and anger among Palestinians. This is why it is absolutely essential to restore calm as soon as possible and to revive the peace negotiations in order also to restart the economy.

United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Development Programme and many other continue to support the peace process by helping to lay the economic and social foundations for a sustainable peace. These efforts have focused on developing Palestinian infrastructure, strengthening institutional capacity and improving the quality of daily life for millions of Palestinians.

For more than half a century, UNRWA has been providing varied humanitarian assistance and essential basic services to some 3.7 million Palestinians registered with the Agency. I would like to use this occasion to call again on donors to provide UNRWA with the resources it requires to keep up with the rising needs of the refugee community. Donor assistance is especially vital now, at a time of crisis and economic hardship.

The United Nations development system has brought extensive multilateral and bilateral assistance to the Palestinian people. UNDP, often in cooperation with other United Nations agencies and individual donor Governments, has been involved in a wide range of development and rehabilitation projects and programmes.

This work includes, among other things, poverty alleviation, capacity-building, institutional development, health care, agriculture, environment and activities in other areas. The United Nations is also supporting the peace process through the efforts of Mr. Terje Rod-Larsen, my Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and my representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. During the past year, Mr. Rod-Larsen has worked closely with the various parties in the region in order to provide them with political support and to coordinate United Nations assistance in the areas of development and peace.

I would also like to mention here the important work carried out by the Humanitarian Task Force for Emergency Needs, headed by the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, in coordinating international assistance for urgent humanitarian needs. To date, the Task Force has coordinated over $9 million in such assistance.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the full commitment of the United Nations to supporting the parties through the peace process. I can also assure the Committee that the United Nations will continue to provide the various forms of assistance to the Palestinian people until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine is achieved and peace and prosperity prevail in the region of the Middle East.

Allow me to commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for 25 years of untiring and dedicated work. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Committee and to you, Sir, for organizing this annual observance. I wish you every success in this important mission.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his personal efforts to promote peace and a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the problems of the Middle East, as well as for his support for the Committee's work.

I call on the President of the Security Council.

Mr. van Walsum (Netherlands), President of the Security Council: Allow me first of all to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the kind invitation extended to me, in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of November, to participate in the annual commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This is a special event through which the international community demonstrates its solidarity with the Palestinian people

and its enduring commitment to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, in accordance with United Nations resolutions.

The question of Palestine has been at the top of the United Nations agenda for more than 50 years. In the exercise of its responsibilities under the Charter, the Security Council has been involved directly and has played a crucial role in this. Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) in particular are broadly recognized as the bases for any viable solution to this question. As President of the Council, I am really gratified by the fact that virtually all agreements and understandings reached by the parties in recent years, including those of the last few months, make explicit reference to the aforementioned resolutions.

As always, the members of the Security Council have been following closely the situation on the ground, as well as the developments in the peace process. We had been encouraged by the measure of progress achieved by the parties at Camp David last July. Despite the inconclusive end of the summit, we looked forward to a prompt and comprehensive agreement, which at times did look imminent.

Regrettably, we witnessed a major outbreak of violence in late September. This remains a grave concern and preoccupation of the Council. The Council acted promptly in response to the situation and the escalating violence by adopting, on 7 October, resolution 1322 (2000). The Sharm el-Sheikh understandings were a welcome step, as they provided an opportunity to end the vicious cycle of violence and get the negotiations back on track. On behalf of the Council, I wish to extend the condolences of the members of the Security Council to the families of all the victims.

I regret to note that events on the ground have not been helpful, leading to greater animosity, tragic loss of life, destruction of property and infrastructure and the dismantling of those psychological and symbolic bridges that the parties had been building over the last decade, with the assistance of the sponsors of the peace process and the broader international community.

In this respect, I would like once again to call on the parties to abide by those understandings and to implement them swiftly and in full. We hope that the serious blow delivered to the peace process by the recent clashes can be overcome and that the process can soon be resumed with a view to achieving a final settlement.

The five-member fact-finding committee which has already been appointed in consultation with the parties and the Secretary-General should take up its responsibilities as soon as possible. The Council will remain seized of the situation in the Middle East and will continue to explore ways of normalizing the situation.

In this process, we benefit from the invaluable support of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who maintains direct contact with the parties, offers encouragement for constructive steps to be taken and advises on courses of action that could lead to de-escalation. The Council is indeed grateful to the Secretary-General for his close personal involvement, discrete and yet forceful work and dedication. It recalls the Secretary-General's mandate from the Council to pursue his good offices with the parties.

We are hopeful that the two sides will soon return to the negotiating table in the spirit of renewed confidence and will be able to make up for the lost time and good will. This is the only way achieve tangible and lasting results. Stirring up differences, mistrust and suspicion will only lead to the perpetuation of mutual misery and destruction. Bridges have to be rebuilt and a real sense of partnership has to be established. The parties should realize that, instead of confronting each other, they should join forces to confront the common problems associated with their unavoidable coexistence. If they accept each other as equal partners and manage their relationship wisely, they can both reap significant benefits.

The Security Council appreciates the efforts of the international community aimed at assisting the parties to overcome the many hurdles in the way of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. This is the only way that the long-running Arab-Israeli conflict can come to an end and that peace, stability and prosperity can take root in the Middle East.

In conclusion, on behalf of all the members of the Security Council, I would like to assure the Committee that the Council will continue to exercise in full its responsibilities under the Charter as regards the question of Palestine. We shall remain committed to the goal of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting

peace in the Middle East for the benefit of all parties concerned, including, of course, the Palestinian people.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, who will be reading out a message from Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to read out the following letter from Mr. Yasser Arafat, President of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority:

> "On the occasion of this solemn meeting being held by the United Nations in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I am pleased to transmit to you and through you to the international community as a whole the greetings of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian leadership. We convey to you our deep thanks for your continued solidarity and constant support for the struggle of the Palestinian people in order to secure the exercise of its inalienable rights, including the right to establish its independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.
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> "It had been expected that the International Day of Solidarity would arrive this year during our celebration of Palestine's admission as a Member of the United Nations and with the achievement of peace between Palestine and Israel. The sad reality is, however, otherwise. The Palestinian people are instead being subjected to a bloody military campaign, which the occupying Power is waging for reasons that appear to include an attempt to break the political will of our people and its leadership and to impose on it unacceptable solutions.
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> "Since the calamitous visit of Sharon to Al-Haram Al-Sharif on 28 September 2000 and our people's widespread and strong protest against it and against the maintenance of the Israeli occupation, Israel has made use of its colossal military machine, including heavy weaponry — such as tanks, helicopters and gunships — and has inflicted terrible human and material losses on our people.
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> "The number of Palestinian martyrs has exceeded 300, and there have been more than 10,000 wounded, about one third of whom are children under the age of 18. Large numbers of them are still in serious condition. The occupation forces have also inflicted extensive damage on our cities, villages and camps and have imposed a military blockade on them that has prevented the movement of persons and goods, thereby exacerbating the suffering of our people to an unbearable degree and inflicting far-reaching damage on a vulnerable Palestinian economy. The world has expressed its condemnation of this Israeli aggression against our people and has called for a halt to Israeli acts of repression and for a return to the peace process.
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> "At the United Nations, as you are aware, the Security Council adopted resolution 1322 (2000), and the General Assembly, at its resumed tenth emergency special session, adopted resolution ES-10/7. While we appreciate the positions taken by the international community, we nevertheless point out that those resolutions have yet to be implemented. What is now required is the demonstration of ever-greater solidarity with our people and the adoption of an unequivocal international stance so that Israel will comply with these resolutions and with international law, in particular international humanitarian law. We now urge that there must be full implementation of resolution 1322 (2000) and effective action by the international fact-finding committee with a view to determining the truth with respect to what happened and ensuring that there is no recurrence. We also call for the provision of international protection to Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation. We believe that the proper way to achieve this objective is through the establishment of a United Nations observer force to be deployed in all localities occupied by Israel since 1967.
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> "Those essential steps would certainly help to halt the Israeli campaign against our people, and this would be conducive to the restoration of calm to the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and to the region in general. It would then be possible, with the necessary political will on the Israeli side, to resume the

peace process and to reach a final agreement between the two sides.

"We remain committed to the peace process and to the pursuit of such an agreement provided that there is a commitment to the basis for this process, namely Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace, subject to the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

"We stress the importance of your solidarity, as well as that of all brothers and friends and all those who cherish peace, freedom and justice, with the Palestinian people in the difficult circumstances in which we find ourselves and in the short time that remains for us to achieve independence and to build our democratic society in Palestine so that we may subsequently, God willing, participate actively alongside other States in the international system and contribute to the strengthening of global peace and the building of a better world for all the peoples of the world.

"Allow me finally to pay great tribute to the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to its Chairman, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, for their sustained efforts to secure these rights in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

"I also wish to commend the efforts of His Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his recent important and intensive endeavours for the restoration of peace and the achievement of the necessary agreements in the region. We believe in the ongoing responsibility of the United Nations with regard to the Palestinian question. We believe the United Nations will play an active and decisive role in the coming period. We also welcome the efforts made by many parties to support the peace process and towards the formulation of the necessary solutions.

"We call upon all these parties to increase their efforts in coordination with the two sponsors of the peace process and the United Nations, so as to ensure the wide participation that will inevitably help advance the peace process.

"I salute you once again in the name of the Palestinian people and its leadership, and I thank you for all your efforts. May I appeal to you to maintain and intensify these efforts so that we may together move from the present crisis to a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Holy Land and in the Middle East as a whole."

This message is signed Yasser Arafat, President of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority, Gaza, 29 November 2000.

May I reiterate my deep gratitude to you, Mr. Chairman, and to all the ladies and gentlemen present.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, and ask him to convey our respect and greetings to Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority. We thank Mr. Arafat for his eloquent message. On behalf of all, I wish to express to him our feelings of solidarity with and support for the Palestinian people in their current trials. I also wish to assure President Arafat, and through him the Palestinian people, of the Committee's firm determination to continue its efforts to promote a comprehensive resolution so that peace will finally be restored to the land of peace.

I am going to suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow some of our guests to leave the room. On behalf of the Committee, I would like once again to thank the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their presence among us and for their important statements.

The meeting was suspended at 11.45 a.m. and resumed at 11.50 a.m.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I call on Mr. John De Saram, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. De Saram (Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the

Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories): I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me as the Chairman of the Special Committee established by the General Assembly to investigate Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories to be present at this solemn occasion and to address this gathering.

To the Palestinian people I have the honour to convey the Special Committee's profound respect and good wishes. Each year the Special Committee has, as required by its mandate, reported to the General Assembly with reference to such difficulties in the occupied territories as settlements and the tense relations that have obtained around settlements, confiscation of lands, water supply for domestic and agricultural use, restrictions on movement of persons and goods, closures of Gaza and the West Bank, treatment of prisoners and detainees, residence in East Jerusalem, travel between Gaza and the West Bank and between the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the economic and social conditions of the occupied territories.

The Special Committee has informed the General Assembly that there is, undoubtedly because of the overall tensions that crowd life in the occupied territories, a comprehensive and elaborate system of laws and regulations and administrative measures in place that affect all aspects of the lives of the peoples of the occupied territories and significantly and substantially infringe their human rights in a manner that is not in accord with what are now regarded as international standards of human rights and humanitarian values. Tragic, overwhelmingly shocking events have, unfortunately, as we know, also taken place in the occupied territories since the end of September.

The Special Committee is profoundly distressed at the magnitude of the force used by the Israeli authorities, the disproportionately large number of Palestinians killed and wounded, the nature of the weaponry utilized by Israeli authorities concerned, the closures and restrictions that affect Palestinian areas and the movement of Palestinians, a state of affairs that, unfortunately, appears to continue in depressing cycles of ever-increasing violence. Where there once was hope there is now death and destruction and a turning away from endeavours for peace.

To those who have lost loved ones in the violence, I convey, on behalf of the Special Committee, the most heartfelt sympathies and condolences. Where deep emotions are in conflict, as they are and have been for much too long, in the occupied territories, where a mood of frustration and hopelessness pervades, as has been the case for much too long in the occupied territories, where tensions are always close to dangerous and explosive levels, as has happened far too often in the occupied territories, then, if violence is not to engulf all, sensitivity and thoughtfulness are the essential overarching requirements.

We, the Special Committee, most profoundly hope that the processes of peace will soon prevail and that steps again will resume along that difficult and necessary path that all must tread if a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, long awaited by all the people of the region, may be satisfactorily concluded.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I wish to thank Ambassador John De Saram for the important statement he has just made. I also commend him for the remarkable work that has been done in the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices.

I now take pleasure in giving the floor to Mr. Dumisani Shadrack Kumalo, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, in his capacity as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): Before I read out the message from President Mbeki, President of the Republic of South Africa and Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), allow me to begin by acknowledging the presence of the President of the General Assembly, the United Nations Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council and welcome among us the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, who is also visiting us here, and all of our visitors from Palestine.

The message from President Mbeki, in his capacity as Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, goes as follows:

> "On behalf of the people of South Africa and the Non-Aligned Movement, I extend warm greetings to all Palestinians on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the

Palestinian People, whether they be in Palestine or in the diaspora.

"Allow me first of all to convey the Non-Aligned Movement's deepest sympathy and condolences to the families and friends of victims of the ongoing attacks of the Israeli security forces on Palestinians. We decry the excessive and disproportionate use of force by the Israeli army.

"At this occasion last year, we were filled with hope for a future which appeared so promising because of the truly encouraging developments and the positive steps that had been taken to move the peace process forward. It is therefore with sadness that we have to commemorate this important day this year amid conflict, a situation far removed from our visions of last year.

"As Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, I wish to reiterate our common conviction that just and lasting peace can only be achieved through peaceful negotiations. We believe that the first priority on the road towards that aim should be the cessation of violence. This can be achieved through concrete steps. First, it is of the highest importance that Israeli troops should withdraw at least to the positions that they occupied before 28 September, the day of Mr. Ariel Sharon's fateful and provocative visit to Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

"Furthermore, the illegal measures of collective punishment against the Palestinian people, such as the total blockade of the Palestinian territories and the economic embargo placed on Palestine, should be ended forthwith. We note that, following the 2 November understanding reached between President Arafat and former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, President Arafat has made several calls for calm, while Prime Minister Barak did not give effect to that agreement because of the explosion in West Jerusalem the next day. Only when these conditions have been met, can it realistically be expected that President Arafat's calls for calm will be heeded.

"The international community can make a meaningful contribution to the restoration of calm and the rebuilding of the trust that has been shattered in the past two months. I want to take this opportunity to renew our call for the immediate stationing, in the occupied Palestinian territories, of an international observer force under the auspices of the United Nations. As Israel has no legitimate jurisdiction in the occupied Palestinian territories, the South African Government does not understand why Israel should be allowed to exercise a veto over the deployment of such a force.

"It is of the greatest importance and urgency that good faith negotiations between Palestine and Israel should resume once calm has returned to the region. It has become clear that the Oslo Process, which has carried on for more than seven years prior to the recent outbreak of violence, has had major flaws. These relate directly to the manner in which Palestinians on the street experience the results of the peace process. Although the Oslo Process has brought a visible improvement in, inter alia, Palestinian infrastructure, by and large it has brought a much more intrusive Israeli security presence into ordinary Palestinian lives by the need to cross interminable checkpoints that have sprung up around every Palestinian urban centre. This could have been offset in the past by progress in the negotiations and the implementation of agreements. However, that has all dried up, and there is no tangible evidence for anyone in the Palestinian streets of a peace dividend any longer. Now there is just the daily humiliation of enduring Israeli roadblocks and the interminable arrogance and provocation of Israeli settlers in Palestine.

"It therefore seems improbable that the Oslo process can simply be resumed without considerable amendment. The South African Government believes that the United Nations, as the organization entrusted with the safeguarding and promotion of world peace, should play a central role in future negotiations, whatever the context or formula for a resumed peace process. Major players such as the European States, various Middle Eastern States and others can also make a meaningful contribution to building peace and should be allowed to play a role.

"To a considerable degree, future negotiations should be about the modalities for the implementation of the existing international

consensus enshrined in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which call for Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied since the 1967 war. The Security Council has also recognized the principle of the self-determination of the Palestinian people and has, conversely, provided for Arab recognition of the right of Israel to exist within secure borders. Land for peace is the only viable option.

"To all our Palestinian brothers and sisters, I wish to reiterate that their struggle is for a legitimate cause. In September this year the Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement, in their declaration made in the context of the Millennium Assembly, reaffirmed the Movement's traditional and long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people and its support for the implementation of all United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine.

"Allow me, therefore, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and particularly on behalf of the Republic of South Africa, to reiterate our commitment to invigorate our support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people's legitimate struggle for freedom and equality as a sovereign member of the family of nations. In effect, it is an affront to all humanity that, while we are dealing with the challenges of and aspirations for the new millennium, our Palestinian brothers and sisters are still hankering for their basic human rights and, as a nation, for the realization of their right to self-determination. It is inexcusable that, more than 50 years after the United Nations affirmed the right of Palestinians to sovereign statehood and more than 30 years after the Security Council, in a binding decision, called on Israel to withdraw from all the Arab territories that it had occupied in the war of June 1967, the suffering and humiliation of foreign military occupation still continue."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Dumisani Shadrack Kumalo, and I ask him to convey to Mr. Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa and Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, the sincere thanks of the Committee for this very important message and for his leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, who will make a statement in his capacity as Chairman of the twenty-seventh session of the Islamic Conference of Ministers for Foreign Affairs.

As Committee members are aware, Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar has arrived in New York as a member of the delegation of the ministerial committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which was sent by the Emir of Qatar, as President of the Islamic Conference summit, to conduct important consultations with the members of the Security Council on the Palestinian question.

Mr. Albar (Malaysia): It gives me great honour, in my capacity as Chairman of the twenty-seventh session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers and on behalf of Malaysian delegation to join this annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this solemn gathering.

We have come together every year to express our support for the people and leadership of Palestine in their quest for a just and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine, which undeniably lies at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This event also reminds us of the pressing need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace throughout the Middle East.

It is with deep regret and sorrow that our observance this year is taking place against the backdrop of escalating violence and the grave, deteriorating situation on the ground. The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and Malaysia reject and condemn the excessive use of force by Israel against Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We cannot afford to remain silent in the face of the continued flagrant violations of the rights of the Palestinian people living under occupation. The current onslaught against them is a clear manifestation of the consistent policy of harassment, intimidation and suppression pursued for decades by Israel, the occupying Power. When human rights are violated, silence simply means condoning such actions. This is tantamount to penalizing the unfortunate victims.

To date 300 Palestinians have been killed — most of them innocent civilians, including children — and more than 3,000 have been wounded as a result of the disproportionate and excessive use of force by Israeli security forces. As Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, most aptly said, the reality of life for Palestinians in the current crisis has been one of "grinding, petty humiliations, discriminations and inequalities [that are] ultimately dehumanizing". The OIC deeply mourns the senseless deaths and offers its profound condolences to the bereaved families as well as to the Palestinian Authority and the people of Palestine.

Malaysia and the OIC also call on Israel to rein in the high-handed actions of its security forces and to bring to justice those directly and wilfully responsible for these tragic deaths. These actions constitute grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which is applicable to all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. The United Nations has a clear responsibility to put an end to violations of the Convention, as well as to ensure the safety and protection of civilians, especially children. The international community must ensure that all appropriate actions are taken to curb the continuing violence and to ensure the protection of innocent civilians — hence the important and urgent need to establish a United Nations protection force, an action that is now being considered by the Security Council.

As a member of the community of nations, Israel cannot continue to turn a deaf ear to the numerous pronouncements of the international community — the latest being Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) of 7 October 2000; resolution S-5/1 of 27 October 2000, adopted by the fifth special session of the Commission on Human Rights; and resolution ES-10/7 dated 1 November 2000, adopted by the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. These resolutions, among others, have called upon Israel to abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and its responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. They demanded the immediate cessation of violence and for all necessary steps to be taken to ensure that violence cease. They also demanded that new, provocative actions be avoided and that the situation return to normal in a way which promotes prospects for the Middle East peace process.

A just and lasting peace can be achieved only with the complete withdrawal of Israeli armed forces and illegal settlers from all Arab and Palestinian lands occupied since 1967, including the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the occupied Syrian Golan.

The people of Palestine have the inalienable right to establish an independent and sovereign State of their own with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its undisputed capital. To this end, the OIC and Malaysia call on Israel to comply with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1322 (2000) and all other relevant resolutions.

The OIC and Malaysia applaud President Arafat's unflinching commitment to the peace process. We recognize that the decision to defer the declaration of independence of Palestine is a clear manifestation of this commitment as well as of his great restraint and statesmanship. The OIC and Malaysia stand firmly by the side of Palestine in its struggle and in this regard strongly support President Arafat's efforts towards declaring the establishment of the independent State of Palestine.

We also appreciate the efforts made by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in consultation with the relevant parties, to bring an end to the long, drawn-out Middle East conflict.

The time has come for us to call for stronger action by this Organization, as well as for those States that have the capacity to act with the same enthusiasm in dealing with the Palestine issue as they do with respect to problems in other parts of the world.

At this critical juncture we should renew and reinvigorate our collective efforts to support the struggle of the people of Palestine for self-determination and for an independent and sovereign homeland and the quest for peace and security in the region.

Today's meeting provides us with the opportunity to manifest our continuing support for, and solidarity with, the people of Palestine in this quest, which they continue to deserve.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia and Chairman of the twenty-seventh session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, for his important statement. I should like to ask him to convey our greetings to the President of the Islamic

Conference, His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, and to thank him most particularly for the way in which he conducted the special meeting devoted to the tragic situation in Palestine. I also ask him to convey to Prime Minister Mahathir our cordial thanks for his unswerving support for the cause of the Palestinian people.

I now call on Mr. Roland Kpotsra, Permanent Representative of Togo to the United Nations, who will read out a message from General Gnassingbe Eyadema, President of the Togolese Republic, in his capacity as Chairman of the Organization of African Unity.

Mr. Kpostra (Togo) (*spoke in French*): I am indeed honoured to read out the message of President Gnassingbe Eyadema, current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity.

"Today, despite the progress achieved in recent years, we are profoundly disquieted by the obstructions placed in the way of the peace process, once again blocking the movement towards the complete independence and self-determination of Palestine.

"The intolerable resurgence of violence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip over the last three months has unfortunately caused a hardening of positions on all sides. Accordingly, it is desirable for the parties concerned to strive to implement without conditions the ceasefire agreement concluded at Sharm El-Sheikh on 17 October 2000 in order to put an end to the hostilities and restore confidence between Palestinian and Israeli leaders.

"We also hope to see the international commission responsible for determining the causes of the recent outbreaks of violence fulfil its mission and submit its report as early as possible, while also hoping that the parties will fully comply with its conclusions.

"In this respect, we welcome the continuing efforts of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the sponsors of the peace process to induce the parties to honour the commitments undertaken at Sharm El-Sheikh and to strive to bring about the advent of lasting peace in the region. This will be the only way to achieve an end to violence and a return to the negotiating table.

"However, we cannot sufficiently emphasize that it is undeniable that the advent of an era of lasting peace, stability and security for the peoples of the Middle East will be possible only through concerted pursuit of the peace process and through the affirmation of a more resolute political will on the part of all concerned on the basis of the pertinent resolutions of the Security Council and in accordance with the principle of land for peace.

"This is why we take the opportunity of this event to once again urge President Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Ehud Barak to be unstinting in their efforts to restart, as early as possible, the discussions broken off as a result of the tragic events that continue to cause bloodshed in the occupied Palestinian territory.

"We should also note once again that the General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed that the United Nations bears permanent responsibility for the question of Palestine until that question is settled in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international legitimacy. Thus, the United Nations must continue to bring its full authority to bear so as to ensure that extremism on any side does not plunge us back into the politics of despair and that the obstinate rejection of the commitments undertaken will not ultimately jeopardize the security of the Middle East as a whole.

"The Organization of African Unity and African States hope that the States Members of the United Nations will strive to permit the United Nations, at the beginning of the new millennium, to assist in the peaceful settlement of the Palestine question.

"From this standpoint we convey our warm congratulations to the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their constant efforts to achieve this lofty objective. May God bless those efforts and permit the return of lasting peace to the Middle East."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I wish to thank Mr. Roland Kpotsra and request him kindly to convey to General Gnassingbe Eyadema, President of the Togolese Republic and Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), our respectful

greetings and our sincere thanks for his important message. I also ask him to convey to President Eyadema our thanks for his leadership of the OAU and for Togo's support of the Palestinian cause.

I now give the floor to Mr. Said Kamal, Under-Secretary-General for Palestinian Affairs of the League of Arab States, who will present the message of Mr. Ahmad Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Kamal (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the League of Arab States, I wish to convey the greetings of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ahmad Esmat Abdel Meguid, as well as his appreciation of all the efforts that the Committee, Member States and organizations are making in the solidarity with the Palestinian people and its just cause.

It is a great honour for me to represent the Secretary-General of the League at this international commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, who more than ever before need the support and assistance of the international community to provide protection and end the aggression unleashed against them by the forces of the Israeli occupation. With that help the Palestinian people will be able to exercise their inalienable national rights, including their right to self-determination and to establish their own independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

In that connection, we express our gratitude and appreciation for the political and material support provided to the Palestinian people by the United Nations, its organs and specialized agencies. I wish to extend special thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, its members and its Chairman, the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka.

Every year on this date we meet to express our solidarity with the Palestinian people and to review the ongoing Israeli policies that are the source of that people's continuing tragedy and that deprive Palestinians of the rights set out by international law and resolutions of international legitimacy. The Israeli spirit of aggression in recent days and months has reached an unconscionable and unacceptable extent. On behalf of the League of Arab States, I have frequently warned from this very podium of the serious consequences of those policies for the Palestinian people, the stability and security of the region, and the vital interests of other States.

I need not repeat today what I have said in the past with regard to Israeli policies that are inimical to peace, as the positions held by those represented here permit them to follow the daily aggression and oppression unleashed against the Palestinian people, as well as the abuse and sabotage of the Middle East peace process by Israel. I will confine myself to quoting a paragraph from my statement last year on this occasion.

> "Such Israeli practices and ideas strip the peace process of its essence and undermine its foundations. They threaten eventually to explode the region and return it to a spiral of violence: people cannot tolerate injustice forever, especially on core questions of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, such as Al-Quds, settlements, the rights of refugees, and self-determination." (*A/AC.183/PV.249, p. 20*)

Recent developments have confirmed our explicit warning. On 28 September 2000, bloody events broke out in Al-Quds Al-Sharif and spread to all other occupied Palestinian territories and to Israel itself. That took place in the wake of a provocative visit by the leader of the extremist Likud party, Mr. Ariel Sharon, with the support of the current Israeli Government. Mr. Sharon violated the sanctity of the esplanade of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, thereby offending the feelings of Palestinians and others in the Islamic and Christian worlds. As is well known, there was no religious reason for that provocative visit. Instead, it was an example of simple disregard for the Holy Places and an attempt to manipulate them for partisan, domestic and external purposes. The Israeli leadership probably even took a strategic or tactical decision to eliminate the Palestinian leadership and return the peace process to square one, something that would have extremely grave results.

The forces of Israeli occupation have used brutal and excessive force against unarmed Palestinians, targeting sensitive parts of their bodies. They have targeted children in particular. They have not hesitated to use every sort of weapon — including tanks, planes and rockets — to strike at residential neighbourhoods and centres and at the offices of the Palestinian National Authority. Those attacks have led to the deaths of hundreds of martyrs and to thousands of

injuries, in addition to paralysing life in the Palestinian territories. Of course, to those effects must be added the results of the embargo, isolation and collective punishment.

Mass media and international human rights organizations have already given a clear picture of the brutal aggression perpetrated against the Palestinian people by the Israeli occupation forces. I would, however, like to condemn in the strongest terms possible the aggression perpetrated against the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, by Zionist settlers while she carried out her duties in Palestinian territories. This is a blatant violation of the principles and norms of international law. It also underscores Israel's cynical disregard for the institutions of the international community, foremost among which is the United Nations, and underscores the brutality of the Israeli occupation forces against Palestinian civilians in the occupied territories.

Given this serious situation, the Arab, regional and international response has been unanimous condemnation of Israeli aggression and affirmation of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, as well as support for their just struggle to regain those rights. The extraordinary Arab summit convened in Cairo on 21 and 22 October 2000 illustrated the national unanimity of Arab solidarity from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf. That solidarity supports the struggle of Palestinians for their sovereignty and dignity and for all they hold sacred. Arab leaders at that meeting held Israel responsible for plunging the region back into tension and violence through its use of aggression and embargoes. It also condemned its violation of the norms of international law and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Israel's actions have practically destroyed peace efforts in the region. It seems that the leadership of Israel has failed to understand the clear political statement issued by that Arab summit. That statement was, and continues to be, a clear warning.

The summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), held at Doha from 12 to 14 November, affirmed the solidarity of the Islamic world with the struggle of the Palestinian people to attain its rights. Like the Arab summit, it held Israel responsible for the events in the Palestinian territories. Support for the intifada of the Palestinian people has come also from the Non-Aligned Movement, from friendly States in Europe and from numerous human rights organizations and committees. That support reflects a noble position that deserves our thanks and our appreciation.

The League of Arab States once again recalls the decisions of Arab and Muslim leaders, and calls for the establishment of an impartial international United Nations fact-finding committee to identify the causes of and the responsibility for the serious deterioration of the situation in the Palestinian territories and the massacres perpetrated by Israeli occupation forces against the Palestinian people. That should take place on the basis of Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) of 7 October 2000, the 19 October 2000 resolution of the fifth special session of the Commission on Human Rights, and the 20 October 2000 resolution of the General Assembly. The League of Arab States also urgently calls upon the Security Council to keep under review developments in the Palestinian territories, because these pose a threat to international peace and security, and to join the General Assembly in shouldering its responsibility to provide international protection for the Palestinian people chafing under the yoke of Israeli occupation. We call upon the United Nations to continue to shoulder that responsibility until the Palestinian people regains all its inalienable rights in Palestine, in accordance with the legitimate demands of the international community.

The ongoing Palestinian intifada and support for that intifada are not incompatible with the Arab and Palestinian peoples' belief in the strategic option of a just peace. In no sense do they mean responding to the calls to engage in the war that Israel is trying to impose on the unarmed Palestinian people and on the entire region by deploying its military arsenal — tanks, aircraft and missiles — to confront children who have nothing but stones with which to defend themselves.

By its very essence, the intifada sends a complex message to the Israelis and to the entire world: that the Palestinian people is tired of waiting for its legitimate rights, that it is tired of procrastination and that it can no longer tolerate further oppression by the occupying Power. The Palestinian people has provided sufficient opportunities for a just peace in the region and has taken sufficient initiatives, none of which, regrettably, have met with understanding or responsiveness from the Israeli side. The message of the intifada is also that the Palestinian people, while committed to the United Nations principle of renouncing war and terrorism,

holds fast to its legitimate rights of self-defence and self-determination, which it is determined to gain by all means accepted by international legitimacy for peoples and nations chafing under the yoke of occupation.

It is time for the Israelis to grow wise, to understand the opportunity to build peace in the region and to bear in mind the human, psychological and economic costs of war. It is time for the Israeli leadership to reconsider its position and to stop the forces of extremism, whether they be military or political, from exercising the arrogance of power and engaging in a policy of aggression and domination. Israel must realize that peace has to be comprehensive and just, and that it can be so only if Israel complies with the norms of international legitimacy, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace and General Assembly resolution 194 (III) regarding the right of return and compensation for Palestine refugees. This would enable the Palestinian people to exercise its legitimate rights, foremost among them the right to self-determination and the right to establish an independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Otherwise, the Palestinian people's intifada will continue and escalate in successive waves in the context of a balance of terror. It will gain support from a long history of steadfastness, from broad international support and from the fact that all Arab States will continue to stand by the Palestinian people until it gains its national rights.

The establishment of peace in the Middle East is more crucial than ever before. The experience of the past 10 years of the peace process has provided numerous lessons that must be learned for the future. The Committee understands the importance of strict compliance with the terms of reference for peace on the basis of the resolutions of international legitimacy, not only because they are the legitimate and logical terms of reference accepted by the international community, but also so that time will not be wasted in a maze of explications and interpretations.

The Committee understands also that sponsorship of the Middle East peace process solely by the United States of America must not be divorced from the spirit of the international terms of reference or from the spirit of balance and impartiality. Otherwise, how can the United States be the major sponsor of the peace process while that process is being destroyed by its strategic ally, Israel, which is using American weapons to kill hundreds and to wound thousands of unarmed Palestinians.

If Israel is not ready for peace on the basis of the international terms of reference, but still dreams of imposing its racist concept of peace — having wasted 10 years in prevarication and in evading even the commitments to which it has agreed — the next phase of the peace process will require that serious consideration be given to the provision of international protection for the Palestinian people from the oppression of Israeli military arrogance, and to the imposition of sanctions against Israel for violating the norms of international legitimacy and the resolutions of the United Nations. Responsibility for ensuring the success of the next phase of the peace process lies primarily with the United States of America, with the other permanent members of the Security Council and with the United Nations as the competent international organization.

The President (*spoke in French*): I request the representative of the League of Arab States to convey to the Secretary-General of the League, His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important message.

I also ask the representative of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to convey our greetings to the Secretary-General of that organization, His Excellency Mr. Azzeddine Laraki.

I call next on Mr. Don Betz, who will make a statement on behalf of the international network of non-governmental organizations on the Palestine question.

Mr. Betz: I am grateful for this opportunity to participate actively in this solemn meeting. We are gathered in this house of peace at a moment of unparalleled peril for the Palestinian people. In my capacity as Chairman of the International Coordinating Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine (ICCP), I have had the distinct honour, thanks to this Committee, to represent the world network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) actively committed to the question of Palestine on several occasions since 1984. I am pleased to note that today many of my NGO colleagues are here in this Chamber; they also gathered earlier today at commemorations in Geneva and in Vienna.

Over these years, I have heard eloquent appeals for solidarity with the people of Palestine, but rarely has there been a time in the struggle for the Palestinians' individual and national rights when the stakes have been so high. International protection for the Palestinian nation must be on the daily agenda of the United Nations and on the priority list of every Member State committed to peace and justice in the Middle East. The survival of the people may literally depend on the clear, focused attention directed to this reality by the world's States and by this gathering place that the States have created — the United Nations.

Each day the world's media report the grim and steadily increasing number of dead and wounded in Palestine. Each day those casualties rise. Each day the antiseptic press admits that most of those killed or wounded are Palestinian. For those in this Chamber, and among the NGOs dedicated to supporting the creation of the state of Palestine, the harsh realities of such reporting are written in the names and ages of Palestinians and in the descriptions of the injuries that they suffer each day.

Many Americans — my countrymen — think the daily clashes, which have become almost monotonous to most of them, are actually occurring in the State of Israel. The fact of the occupation is now lost on a world preoccupied with a thousand distractions. The issue of Palestine and peace in the Middle East is not foremost in the global public's mind. The raw and protracted injustice of this reality does not command the sustained interest of a cyber-preoccupied, self-indulgent world.

First and foremost, the immediate issue before us must be saving lives, so that parents and their children may actually live that peace that all of us daily dream of and strive for in thought, word and deed. Today in Palestine peace is an orphan — almost a myth among the reports of gunships destroying buildings and of public accusations that it is the Palestinians who have placed Israel under siege, and the inexorable daily tally of the dead and wounded.

The scars resulting from this national sustained cry for independence and for help are indelibly written on the faces and bodies of children and adults in Palestine, some of whom will be disfigured for life.

Hundreds of non-governmental organizations have for many years been speaking, writing, gathering, lobbying and demonstrating about the impact of this injustice and proclaiming their support for United Nations resolutions on peace in the Middle East. There has been a close association between the NGO movement and the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People since the 1983 United Nations Conference on the Question of Palestine.

In general, NGOs have assumed increasingly relevant roles on international issues and the work of the United Nations. It was earlier this year that the Secretary-General of the United Nations eloquently reminded us that only through a collaboration among nation-States, international organizations and non-governmental organizations that an effective, active global coalition can be assembled to tackle the problems of the planet, which eclipse the ability of any actor to satisfactorily resolve.

NGOs remain unswervingly committed to the United Nations, to its values and to the relevant resolutions as the only effective pathway to peace. The collapse of the peace process, which conspicuously bypassed the United Nations most of the time, clearly confirms the accuracy of this NGO vision. One nation alone, even a super-Power, cannot produce peace between the parties when its own policies and relations are consistently and overwhelmingly biased in favour of one party.

The NGO network believes that it is time to return to the United Nations as the epicentre of any genuine international search for peace and for the United Nations to step forward and fulfil this role. Any serious path to peace must be directly and indirectly connected to resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as has been mentioned several times today, and to the United Nations. It is time, we believe, to return this global Organization to its rightful place at the centre of new resolve, and there is not a moment to spare.

Though many years old, the land-for-peace formula, articulated in 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), squarely addresses the illegality of protracted occupation and reminds us that, despite sophistry to the contrary, whole sections of international law, the law of responsible nations, squarely apply to the question of Palestine.

This is day 62 of the new intifada, as some call it, and the number of dead and wounded will increase at the expense of Palestinian youth and their mourning families. For many NGOs, this stark reality means that

genuine progress to end the confrontation by seeking a real and workable peace must emerge as the top priority of the United Nations and each of its Member States, and for every Member State and many non-governmental organizations in all parts of the world, we are actively striving to produce the same result.

It is imperative to bring the quest for peace back to this house of peace, dedicated from its inception to the pursuit and maintenance of peace. NGOs are eager to assist in mobilizing civil societies and to urge support from their Governments for such an initiative. Since 1983 and the United Nations Conference on Palestine, NGOs, as an emerging network, have toiled as civil partners with the United Nations in championing the rights of the Palestinian people. The securing of the Palestinian right to a state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, the right to return, the right to freedom from want and fear, and the right to live a normal life is the common bond that links NGOs to one another and that, we believe, links us to this international Organization.

It is time to introduce a new generation to the applicability and value of international law, to resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and to a United Nations striding into a new era with confidence and competence. Nothing less than the fate of the Palestinian people is the issue before us.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Betz for the valuable contributions that non-governmental organizations have always made to the work of the Committee.

I now have the honour to announce that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has received messages of support and solidarity from many heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations. The texts of the messages will be published in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights, but I would like to read out the list of names of those who have sent them.

We have received messages from the following heads of State: His Excellency Mr. Burhanuddin Rabbani, President of the Islamic State of Afghanistan; His Excellency Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the People's Democratic of Algeria; His Excellency Mr. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil; His Excellency Mr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba; His Excellency Mr. Glafcos Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus; His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt; His Excellency Le Général de Brigade Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea; His Excellency Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, President of the Republic of Guyana; His Excellency Mr. Seyed Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran; His Majesty Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; His Excellency Mr. Khamtay Siphandone, President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic; His Majesty Mohammed VI, King of the Kingdom of Morocco; His Excellency Dr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia; His Excellency Mr. Valentin Paniagua, President of the Republic of Peru; His Excellency Mr. Joseph Estrada, President of the Republic of the Philippines; His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar; His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation; His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal; Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; His Excellency Mr. Omer Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir, President of the Republic of the Sudan; His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia; His Excellency Mr. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, President of the Republic of Turkey; His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates; His Excellency Mr. Hugo Chávez Frías, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; His Excellency Mr. Tran Duc Luong, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam; and His Excellency Field Marshal Ali Abdullah Saleh, President of the Republic of Yemen.

We have also received messages from the following heads of Government: Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Ermoshin, Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus; His Excellency Mr. Samdech Hun sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia; His Excellency Mr. Zhu Rongji, Prime Minister of the Council of State of the People's Republic of China; His Excellency Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of the Republic of India; His Excellency Mr. Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho; His Excellency Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius; His Excellency General

Pervez Mosharraf, Prime Minister of Pakistan; and His Excellency Mr. Chuan Leekpai, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand.

We have also received messages from the following Ministers for Foreign Affairs: His Excellency Mr. Adalberto Rodríguez Giavarini, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Argentine Republic; His Excellency Mr. Guillermo Fernández de Soto, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Colombia; His Excellency Mr. János Martonyi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary; His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Said Al-Sahaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq; His Excellency Mr. Yohei Kono, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan; Her Excellency Mrs. Lila Ratsifandriamanana, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Madagascar; His Excellency Mr. Yousef Bin Al-Alawi Bin Abdulla, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman; His Excellency Mr. Petre Roman, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania; His Excellency Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic; and His Excellency Mr. Anatolyi Zlenko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

The Governments of Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic and Uruguay have also sent messages.

A message was received from the delegation of the Republic of Zimbabwe to the United Nations.

We have also received messages from the European Union, Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim of the Organization of African Unity and Secretary-General Azzeddine Laraki of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Messages have also been sent by the following non-governmental organizations: the European Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine, Federación Palestina del Perú, the Indo-Arab Friendship Association and the International Progress Organization.

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People as a whole, I should like to express our sincere appreciation to the heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations I have just mentioned, as well as to all participants for their unceasing efforts to achieve a comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine and especially for the support they have always given to the mandated activities of that Committee.

The statements we have heard and the messages of solidarity we have received today demonstrate once again the determination of the international community to progress towards the establishment of peace in the Middle East through the attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with United Nations resolutions and international law. I can assure everyone here that the members of the Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people will spare no effort to achieve these objectives.

I now have the pleasure and honour of calling on His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine Liberation Organization) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me pleasure, at the close of this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People to restore its inalienable national historic rights, to express on behalf of the Palestinian people and its representative, the Palestine Liberation Organization, our deep thanks and gratitude to all those who have participated in the observance of this Day.

Special thanks go to the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Holkeri; Secretary-General Kofi Annan; and Mr. Peter van Walsum, President of the Security Council, for their participation this morning and for their messages of solidarity.

We also wish to express our full appreciation for the messages of solidarity sent by heads of State or Government and Ministers for Foreign Affairs of friendly countries.

We are also grateful for the messages sent by the Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement and by Mr. Albar, Minister for Foreign Affairs Malaysia, in his capacity as Chairman of the twenty-seventh Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, and by the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

The concerted, continuous efforts and leadership of the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Alienable Rights of the Palestinian People have had a great supporting impact on the cause of Palestine in all international forums. We appreciate his dedicated

and sincere efforts on his part and those of all the members of his Committee. We also appreciate all his good offices, carried out both in the name of his country and on his own behalf. We would like to express our thanks to everyone who made this celebration possible as well as for their participation, either by their presence or by making statements of solidarity.

The question of Palestine has now reached a boiling point because of the failure of the peace process. This failure is due to the intransigence of the rulers of Israel, to their procrastination and to their resort to terrorism and use of force and violence in trying to coerce our people to their failed proposals. Our people have demonstrated great patience; nine years have passed since we accepted the peace process, along with other Arab brothers. We have pursued the course of negotiations, but still to no avail. These negotiations have strengthened the doubts of the Palestinian people regarding the peace process, with its accumulation of constant offers and promises that have not materialized.

Let me cite as an example the content of a letter sent by a sponsor of the peace process, President Clinton, to President Arafat on 26 April 1999:

(*spoke in English*)

> "In this context, and in the spirit of my remarks in Gaza, we support the aspirations of the Palestinian people to determine their own future on their own land. As I said in Gaza, I believe Palestinians should live free today, tomorrow and forever.
>
> "The United States further believes that the Oslo process was never intended to be open-ended, although we have extended the negotiations for two years, and now we are stopped at the impasse of the peace process."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Looking back at these long experiences and futile negotiations, and in view of these provocative Israeli acts and acts of aggression, we note that all these factors have led to the eruption of the uprising of the Palestinian people.

The United Nations is in the final analysis the organization responsible for maintaining peace and security across the globe. Therefore, we call upon the United Nations to provide protection for the Palestinian people, because the United Nations itself was the entity responsible for creating the problem of Palestine. Political settlements should be reached on the basis of United Nations actions. This remains the paramount responsibility of the United Nations until a just solution to the Palestine question is reached.

In closing, we would like to express our thanks and appreciation to you all. Peace be upon all of you.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I believe that the instructive points that Mr. Khaddoumi has raised will have been useful to us all. I would ask Mr. Khaddoumi to convey to President Arafat and to the Palestinian people our wholehearted solidarity and support.

We are still receiving messages. The list will be updated later. We have received messages from Mr. Ali Abdullah Saleh, President of the Republic of Yemen; from General Pervez Musharraf, Executive Head of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; and Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, President of the Republic of Guyana.

Before adjourning this solemn meeting, I wish to thank once again everyone who made it possible, in particular the members of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department of Conference Services, the Department of Public Information and everyone who has been working behind the scenes.

I also wish to recall that an exhibition of Palestinian art, organized by the Committee in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, will be opened tonight at 6 p.m. in the public lobby of the General Assembly building. This year's exhibition, entitled "The Land", comprises a collection of paintings by Palestinian artists. The opening will be followed by a reception, to which everyone here is invited.

Also, immediately following this meeting, there will be a screening in this Chamber of two video, one entitled "Behind the Walls", a joint United Arab Emirates and Palestinian Authority production, and the other entitled "Despite the Odds", produced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). All those present are kindly invited to remain in the Chamber to see these videos.

Once again, I wish to thank all those present for their attendance.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.